

• *The Assyrian threat was at its worst*

Isaiah chapters 36–39 are four chapters of history. They were probably taken from well-known records (2 Kings 18–20 makes use of very similar material, although probably Isaiah’s version was not taken from 2 Kings directly). First Isaiah tells (in chapters 36–37) of a time when the Assyrian threat was at its worst.

• *Sennacherib conquered most of Judah and attacked Jerusalem*

The ‘fourteenth year’ mentioned in 36:1 is 701 BC. There is reason to think that Hezekiah at first reigned jointly with his father and was sole king from 715 BC. Sennacherib conquered most of Judah<sup>□1</sup>, and then went on to try to conquer Jerusalem. It was an act of betrayal, since he had accepted money in return for a promise to treat Judah as a friendly nation<sup>□2</sup>.

**1. Sin will always lead to calamity – history fulfilled Isaiah's predictions**

1. **Sin will always lead to calamity. History fulfilled Isaiah's predictions.** Isaiah had warned that unfaithfulness to God would result in invasion by the Assyrians, and now it is happening. Sennacherib was at Lachish, about fifty kilometres away from Jerusalem. Rabshakeh, an army commander sent by Sennacherib to demand Hezekiah’s surrender, stops outside Jerusalem near to the channel conveying water to the city<sup>□1</sup>.

• *Judah had been careless about idolatry and social decay*

Sin may go on for years but eventually it will bring disaster. Judah had been careless about idolatry and social decay for many years. Now there is calamity and the crisis is a very severe one. Three Judean officials come out on the wall of Jerusalem to talk to the Assyrians<sup>□1</sup>. Rabshakeh sends a message to Hezekiah. He is foolish — they say — to be so confident as to think he can survive. His military strength is almost nil<sup>□2</sup>. Egypt will be no help to them (36:6). As for trusting in the LORD – says the Assyrian official — he is offended because Hezekiah has taken away his ‘high places’!<sup>□3</sup> They do not have enough men in Jerusalem to use the horses that they would need to conquer the Assyrians – and they do not have the horses either<sup>□4</sup>. A junior Assyrian soldier could easily defeat Jerusalem<sup>□5</sup> and the Assyrians have Yahweh’s authority for their attack on Jerusalem!<sup>□6</sup>

• *Rabshakeh tells Hezekiah that Jerusalem cannot defend itself*

At this point the Judeans ask that Aramaic – the language of diplomacy – should be used so that the local population who speak Hebrew will not know what is happening. But this only gives the Assyrians another idea, and they begin to address the population directly in Hebrew persuading them to surrender<sup>□1</sup>. Rabshakeh advises them against trusting Hezekiah<sup>□2</sup>.

• *The Judeans ask to talk in Aramaic*

He advises them against faith in Yahweh<sup>□1</sup>. The Assyrians will treat them well – he says<sup>□2</sup> – and he will soon take them to a pleasant new home<sup>□3</sup>. This is his way of describing exile to Assyria! Rabshakeh is specially insulting towards God. Yahweh cannot deliver them, he says<sup>□4</sup>. Yahweh is no better than other gods<sup>□5</sup>. The people remain silent<sup>□6</sup>.

• *Rabshakeh tells the people to submit to the Assyrians and insults Yahweh*

This is the way it will be when our sins ‘find us out’. An enemy will come (of one kind or another) and we shall have nowhere to turn except to God. Enemies take control of us when we leave God out of consideration in our lives or our country. They use ridiculous arguments and try to deceive us. They depress us and point to our weaknesses. The very things we hope they will not do are the very things they do to us.

• *When we ignore God, enemies take control*

□1 36:1

□2 2 Kings 18:15-16

□1 36:2

□1 36:3

□2 36:4-5

□3 36:7

□4 36:8

□5 36:9

□6 36:10

□1 36:11-13

□2 36:14

□1 36:15

□2 36:16

□3 36:17

□4 36:18

□5 36:19-20

□6 36:21

• It is a great mistake to ridicule God

**2. We shall be forced eventually to turn back to God**

• Hezekiah finally turns back to God – he asks for Isaiah’s prayers

**3. We shall discover that God is good**

• Hezekiah is told not to fear the Assyrians

• God will never forsake His people

But God’s enemies make a great mistake when they ridicule God himself! When Rabshakeh crushes Jerusalem, it is only God’s judgement against his people. But when Rabshakeh ridicules God he is taking on more than he can handle. This is the way it is with the enemies of God’s people. They are used by God to rebuke us, but then they go too far!

2. **We shall be forced eventually to turn back to God.** Hezekiah at last turns to God. He had been trusting in Egypt! We are always foolish when we turn away from God as our first source of trust. Somehow it seems that we can trust something worldly but we are afraid to trust God himself. It did Hezekiah no good when he was looking to Egypt for help. In the end he has to come back to God alone. When the king is told the news<sup>□1</sup>, he responds with distress<sup>□2</sup> and turns to God<sup>□3</sup>. He sends some of his officials to Isaiah<sup>□4</sup>, telling him of the seriousness of the situation<sup>□5</sup>, asking for Isaiah’s prayers and pointing to Rabshakeh’s way of insulting God<sup>□6</sup>. Hezekiah ‘comes to his senses’, turns to God. Then he turns to the source of God’s word – Isaiah. He admits the need for prayer. He should have done all this a long time before!

3. **We shall discover that God is good.** We should have known it all the time. It is a pity that Hezekiah took so long to turn back to the God he had trusted at earlier times in his life. Isaiah takes no time at all to answer. ‘Do not be afraid . . . he will return to his own country . . . I will have him cut down with the sword’<sup>□1</sup>. Rabshakeh made a great mistake when he started ridiculing God. Hezekiah is told not to fear. The one thing God does not like is that we should ever fear anything or anyone but the Lord himself. ‘Do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it’, said Isaiah<sup>□2</sup>. Yahweh Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy. He is the one you are to fear; he is the one you are to dread<sup>□3</sup>. But even the fear of God is only fear of his chastening. He will never reject us; he will never forsake us. We need fear no Assyrian, no Rabshakeh. And we never need to fear that God will leave his people. Even at our worst he will come to rescue us, for the sake of the glory of his own name. It will be painful if we drift from God, but amidst the calamities that come we shall still discover that God is good.

□1 36:22  
 □2 37:1  
 □3 37:1  
 □4 37:2  
 □5 37:3  
 □6 37:4

□1 37:5-7  
 □2 8:12  
 □3 8:13

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